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Visits are happening again at long-term care homes in B.C. This is what they look like

Deo Manik went months without seeing Shanta, his wife of 59 years. Now they get to reunite through Plexiglas

[Jesse Johnston](#) · CBC News · Posted: Aug 17, 2020 3:00 AM PT | Last Updated: August 17, 2020





Manik Shanta talks to her husband Deo through Plexiglas at the Normanna Living care centre in Burnaby, B.C., on Aug. 13. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

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After finding the perfect care home in the perfect location close to his home in Burnaby, Deo Manik gave his wife Shanta a big hug and told her he'd be back soon to visit.

It was mid-March, days before all care facilities in the province, including Normanna Living where Shanta lives, went into lockdown due to COVID-19.

Deo, 82, hasn't embraced Shanta since.

"I want to hug my wife," he said. "I'm waiting for that one thing."

With visitors banned from care homes for much of the pandemic to stop the spread of the coronavirus, online video chats were the only way thousands of B.C. families could communicate with elderly loved ones.

Deo and Shanta's daughter Sadhana Kumar says those conversations were difficult because Shanta, 82, has dementia.

"It was very hard for her to focus on the iPad and she would say sometimes, 'Why aren't you here?'" Kumar said. "We could tell she was getting angry."

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In late June, the B.C. government announced care homes could allow visitors — under strict guidelines — if they submitted plans to the province outlining how the visits could be conducted in a safe manner.

Earlier this month, Health Minister Adrian Dix confirmed he has received plans from every long term care home and assisted living facility in the province.

Deo still can't hug his wife, but they can now sit in the same room, singing songs in Hindi and chatting about what life will be like when the pandemic ends.

"I promise her I will take her to do her hair," he said. "When it's okay, I'll take you to the hairdresser."



Shawn Kumar and his mother Sadhana Kumar visit Sadhana's mother, Shanta Manik, at Normanna Living care centre in Burnaby, B.C., on Aug. 13. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

Safety protocols

At Normanna Living, guests need to answer a series of questions before they're allowed to enter the building.

Once they've confirmed to staff through the intercom that they have no COVID-19 symptoms, haven't traveled outside the country and haven't contacted anyone who has the virus, they're buzzed inside for a temperature check.

Director of care Ramon Castillo says once guests sanitize their hands and put on their masks, they're escorted to the meeting area where Plexiglas separates the resident and the visitor.

"It's kind of really careful, in terms of the visitors coming in because you're adding another factor in terms of risk," he said.

"We have to be really careful with how we accommodate the visitors here."



Deo still can't hug his wife, but they can now sit in the same room, singing songs in Hindi and chatting about what life will be like when the pandemic ends. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

Family visits

All half-hour appointments must be booked in advance and only one visitor is allowed in the building at a time.

When Deo visits Shanta, Kumar and her son, Shawn, often come with him and sit outside, looking in through a window as the whole family talks to each other on speaker phone.

"I'm thankful for what we have," Shawn said. "Even with COVID, we're able to see our relatives and other people can, too. I'm really grateful."

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Deo can't care for Shanta at home at any more due to health issues, so he appreciates that she gets excellent care and he's now able to see her.

But he still wants his hug, preferably before the couple reaches a major milestone on September, 22.

"I'm going to celebrate our 60th anniversary," he said. Six months and no hugs, no kisses. I'm missing that."

'I'm thankful for what we have,' Shawn Kumar said. 'Even with COVID, we're able to see our relatives and other people can, too. I'm really grateful.' (Ben Nelms/CBC)

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